DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 159 958 HE 010 397

TITLE	Recommendations on Credentialing Educational Accomplishment.
INSTITUTION	American Council on Education, Washington, D.C. Task Force on Educational Credit and Credentials.
PUB DATE	78
NOTE	40p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Sales Office, Publications Division, American Council on Education, One Dupont Circle, Washington, D.C. 20036 ($0.75)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Accreditation (Institutions); Adult Students; Articulation (Program); *College Credits; Continuing Education Units; *Credentials; *Credits; Curriculum Evaluation; Degree Requirements; Degrees (Titles); *Educational Assessment; Educational Certificates; Employment Qualifications; Evaluation Needs; Higher Education; Postsecondary Education As a Field of Study; Residence Requirements; Special Degree Programs; Transfer Policy

ABSTRACT

Fifteen recommendations, based on a two-year study, are presented on the credit and credential system in postsecondary education. Objectives are to increase the awareness of employers and those concerned with postsecondary education of the educational and social significance of credentialing educational accomplishment and to help institutions adopt more effective policies and practices for the credit and credentialing system. Three audiences are addressed: leaders of postsecondary education institutions; federal and state governments, foundations, and influential persons; and users of educational credits and credentials, including employers. A modification of postsecondary education's basic system for awarding educational credit and credentials is recommended. A modified system, as compared with the present system, should permit learners to move among different types of institutions and extrainstitutional learning opportunities as necessary to achieve their educational objectives. The results can be more effective use of all educational resources available in the society, improved social equity of credentials, more accurate placement in educational programs, and heightened motivation to learn. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

HE010397

ED159958

RECOMMENDATIONS ON CREDENTIALING EDUCATIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT

BY THE
TASK FORCE ON EDUCATIONAL CREDIT AND CREDENTIALS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

American Council on Education

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

HE 010 397

AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, D.C.

© 1978 by American Council on Education
One Dupont Circle
Washington, D.C. 20036

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Price: $0.75 per copy, including postage

Order from:
Sales Office, Publications Division
American Council on Education
One Dupont Circle, Washington, D.C. 20036

Contents

Foreword, by J. W. Peltason v

A Note on Terminology x

Credits and Credentials in Today's Society 1

The Recommendations 5

- One 6
- Two 7
- Three 9
- Four 11
- Five 12
- Six 13
- Seven 14
- Eight 16
- Nine 17
- Ten 18
- Eleven 20
- Twelve 21
- Thirteen 22
- Fourteen 24
- Fifteen 25

Needed Next Steps 26

This report was approved by the Commission on Educational Credit of the American Council on Education on November 22, 1977. It was endorsed by the Council's Board of Directors on January 30, 1978.

Foreword

Both educational and social problems with the credit and credential system in postsecondary education prompted the Commission on Educational Credit of the American Council on Education to initiate the two-year study, of which one result is this report. Socially, the growing use of educational credentials as qualification for employment has brought into focus a significant issue with respect to credit and credentials, that is, their applicability to the work setting and, therefore, the fairness of their use. Educationally, the postsecondary community needs to move forward in modifying the present credit and credential system to accommodate learning attained in a variety of settings and under a variety of sponsorships and, at the same time, to maintain academic standards. Moreover, in any action on these matters, it is important to social progress that, through the credit and credential system, society's members be encouraged to pursue non-job-related learning by receiving appropriate recognition for their educational accomplishment.

This report, then, has two principal purposes: (1) to bring employers and those concerned with postsecondary education to increased awareness of the educational and social significance of credentialing educational accomplishment, and (2) to recommend changes in the credit and credentialing system so as to improve the quality of information conveyed. To the latter end, the report makes recommendations that will help institutions, individually and collectively, to adopt policies and practices more effective and consistent than those prevailing.

The report is addressed primarily to three audiences. The first is leaders of institutions of postsecondary education. The second is policy makers in education associations, the federal and state governments, and foundations as well as other opin-

ion makers who influence postsecondary education. The third audience is users of educational credits and credentials, including employers, who should find the report will help them examine their policies concerning educational accomplishment credentialed by postsecondary institutions.

This report is brief in order to encourage its careful study by leaders who can stimulate the actions necessary to bring the recommendations to full consideration and implementation. Brevity has risks in dealing with so complex a subject as credit and credentials, for the many intricacies and nuances that lie behind the report's recommendations may not be widely understood. For that reason, the Council is publishing a companion book, *Credentialing Educational Accomplishment*. It will contain analyses of the problems and issues as seen by the Task Force which developed this report as well as the extensive working papers which the Task Force considered during its deliberations. Policy makers and scholars will find the companion volume useful in gaining a deeper understanding of the basis for the recommendations.

The development of the report under the aegis of the American Council on Education signifies in itself that leaders in the postsecondary education community are willing to seek solutions to problems significant to society by bringing increased order and coherence to the credit and credentialing system. But the report is only a first step. Institutions and their organizations must follow through if others are to be convinced that primary responsibility for educational credit and credentials should remain with the postsecondary educational community.

Educational credit and credentials are too intrinsic to the academic enterprise and to social equity to be left unattended for prolonged periods of time. The ACE Commission on Educational Credit will therefore give continuing, systematic attention to credit and credentials for postsecondary education. The overall, long-term objective, consistent with one purpose of this report, will be to improve the quality of information conveyed by credit and credentials, both for social and for educational purposes.

The Council is grateful to Carnegie Corporation of New York for its grant supporting this effort, to the Commission on Edu-

cational Credit for initiating and providing general oversight of the Task Force activities, and to the authors of the working papers.

Special gratitude is expressed to members of the Task Force who helped design the study before the grant was obtained and met several times over the next two years to deliberate the issues and to develop this report. Their willingness voluntarily to participate in such an activity, both lengthy and demanding, is an illustration of the Council's greatest resource.

The recommendations contained herein are commended for implementation by institutions and the pertinent agencies serving postsecondary education.

J. W. PELTASON, *President*
American Council on Education

MEMBERS OF TASK FORCE

A. D. Albright, President, Northern Kentucky University

J. Douglas Conner, Executive Secretary, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers

May N. Diaz, Provost, Kresge College, University of California, Santa Cruz

John F. Grede, Vice-Chancellor, Career and Manpower Programs, City Colleges of Chicago

Cyril O. Houle, Professor of Education, University of Chicago; Senior Program Consultant, W. K. Kellogg Foundation

Jack C. Merwin, Professor, College of Education, University of Minnesota

Peter Meyer, Educational Consultant, Route 1, Box 98A, Burnsville, North Carolina

J. Boyd Page, President, Council of Graduate Schools in the United States; *Chairman*

Kenneth E. Young, President, Council on Postsecondary Accreditation

Task Force Staff

Jerry W. Miller, Director, Office on Educational Credit, American Council on Education

Henry A. Spille, Associate Director, Office on Educational Credit, American Council on Education

L. E. Boswell, Assistant Director for Publications, Office on Educational Credit, American Council on Education

AUTHORS OF WORKING PAPERS

Richard L. Ferguson, Vice-President, Research and Development, American College Testing Program

John Folger, Policy Coordinator, Education Commission of the States

John Harris, Professor of Education, Middle Tennessee State University

Donald P. Hoyt, Director, Office of Educational Resources, Kansas State University

Robert Kirkwood, Executive Director, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools

William Troutt, Assistant Project Director, Tennessee Higher Education Commission

Jonathan Warren, Research Psychologist, Educational Testing Service—Berkeley

COMMISSION ON EDUCATIONAL CREDIT

American Council on Education

Terms ending December 31, 1977

Dorothy Arata, Assistant Provost, Michigan State University; *Chairman*
J. Douglas Conner, Executive Secretary, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers
Frank G. Dickey, Interim Academic Dean, Department of Academic Studies, North Carolina School of the Arts
Gary L. Filerman, President, Association of University Programs in Health Administration
Cyril O. Houle, Professor of Education, University of Chicago; Senior Program Consultant, W. K. Kellogg Foundation

Terms ending December 31, 1978

Neal R. Berte, President, Birmingham-Southern College
Samuel B. Gould, Chancellor Pro Tem, Commission for Higher Education, Connecticut
Barbara H. Knudson, Professor, Department of Criminal Justice Studies, University of Minnesota
Robert J. Kost, Director, Marketing Educational Services, General Motors Corporation
Kenneth E. Young, President, Council on Postsecondary Accreditation

Terms ending December 31, 1979

Shirley S. Chater, Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs, University of California, San Francisco
Walter G. Davis, Director, Department of Education, AFL-CIO
Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr., President, American Association of Community and Junior Colleges
T. Edward Hollander, Chancellor, New Jersey State Department of Education
J. Boyd Page, President, Council of Graduate Schools in the United States

Terms ending December 31, 1980

John F. Grede, Vice-Chancellor, Career and Manpower Programs, City Colleges of Chicago
Owen B. Kiernan, Executive Director, National Association of Secondary School Principals
John W. Porter, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Michigan State Department of Education
Herman B. Smith, Jr., Chancellor, University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff
Thurman J. White, Vice-President for Continuing Education and Public Service, University of Oklahoma

American Council on Education, Board of Directors Members, ex officio

Martha E. Church, President, Hood College
Bill J. Priest, Chancellor, Dallas County Community College District
J. W. Peltason, President, American Council on Education

A Note on Terminology

Changes that have come about in postsecondary education relatively recently have introduced new concepts and some new terms to describe them. To assure that readers have a common understanding of some basic terms used in the pages that follow, a few are here defined.

Credit unit: Official certification of a course completed satisfactorily, statements of competence, and other increment of verified educational accomplishment (theses, oral and written examinations, internships, etc.) accepted toward completion of requirements for certificates and degrees. Credit units are most often assigned semester or quarter hour values.

Degree: An honor bestowed by an educational institution for meeting its requirements through the satisfactory completion of a program of study or other verified educational accomplishment.

Educational credential: A certificate, diploma, or degree document (associate, baccalaureate, or graduate) certifying that the requirements therefor have been met through satisfactory completion of a program of study or other verified educational accomplishment.

External degree: An academic award earned through one or more of the following means: extrainstitutional learning, credit by examination, specially devised experiential learning programs, self-directed study, and satisfactory completion of campus or noncampus courses. In some programs, the learning is attained in circumstances outside the sponsorship or supervision of the awarding agency.

Extrainstitutional learning: Learning that is attained outside the sponsorship of legally authorized and accredited postsecondary institutions. The term applies to learning acquired from work and life experiences, independent reading and study, the mass media, and participation in formal courses sponsored by associations, business, government, industry, the military, unions, and other social institutions such as hospitals.

Higher education: The part of postsecondary education that leads to the award of a degree.

Postsecondary education: The array of educational opportunities available to post-high-school age adults, including educational programs of postsecondary education institutions and extrainstitutional learning experiences defined above.

Credits and Credentials in Today's Society

Postsecondary education's basic system for awarding educational credit and credentials should be retained, but it should be modified to serve more adequately present-day educational and social needs. That is the first recommendation and the basic premise of this report.

Modification is the strategy selected because designing and implementing a new system would be neither practical nor warranted. The present system has the clear-cut advantage of being widely used and generally understood, both in its operation and its imperfections. Modifying the system can help meet two pressing needs:

- The need for credits and credentials to communicate their meaning accurately and adequately, and
- The need to incorporate into the credit and credential system recognition not only for learning attained in different types of postsecondary education institutions and diverse curricula, but also for learning attained in structured and nonstructured extrainstitutional settings.

A modified system, as compared with the present system, should permit learners to move among different types of institutions and extrainstitutional learning opportunities as necessary to achieve their educational objectives. The results can be more effective use of all the educational resources available in the society, improved social equity of credentials, more accurate placement in educational programs, and heightened motivation to learn.

The present system, which dates back to around the turn of the century, served education and society quite well so long as institutions were relatively homogeneous in the characteristics of faculties, students, courses, modes of instruction, academic

calendars, curricular and institutional structures, and graduation requirements. Today, the types of institutions, curricula, and objectives of students are far more heterogeneous. Access to learning has been vastly improved, and interest in nontraditional education and open learning is growing. There is also a sharpened awareness that substantial educational programs of a postsecondary nature are being offered by proprietary schools, government agencies, business, industry, the military, unions, voluntary and professional associations, and other social institutions such as hospitals—often with educational outcomes equivalent to those associated with curricula of colleges and universities.

"Postsecondary education" is the dominant concept today. The term is appropriately used when it is applied to the array of educational opportunities available to post-high-school age adults—programs of colleges and universities, other postsecondary institutions, and the educational sponsors noted above. Although colleges and universities are still referred to as institutions of *higher* education, they are now considered part of *postsecondary* education. In recent years, colleges and universities have broadened their curricula and student clientele. Many now offer a number of programs that do not result in the award of a degree. Thus, the term "higher education" as an institutional descriptor is increasingly ambiguous. It is more accurately used, at least for purposes of credits and credentials, when it is limited to curricula leading to the award of a degree.

The diversity of sponsors and the numbers of participants in postsecondary education have important implications for credit and credentials. Large numbers of students can be expected to have had learning experiences in two or more educational settings or in two or more curricula offered by postsecondary education institutions. As their personal circumstances and educational objectives change, they often seek to have their learning, wherever and however attained, incorporated into the credit and credentialing system. In this way they can take advantage of subsequent educational opportunities without duplicating educational experiences and wasting personal resources.

Recent social changes also carry important implications for

policies and practices in credentialing educational accomplishment. Linkages between education and performance in the work setting have become a dominant theme in public discussions on education. As a result, society has come to emphasize credits and credentials somewhat more as measures of a person's capabilities, competences, and learning, and somewhat less as accolades for educational accomplishment. Among students, there appears to be a growing concern with how the institution's credentials will help them get a job or pursue advanced study. And employers are becoming concerned with the validity of credentials as predictive for performance in the work place.

Along with changes in postsecondary education has come a countervailing concern with general liberal education as an important personal educational objective of students and as a component of programs leading to degrees in professional and technical fields. Additionally, recognition is spreading that for a person to be a contributing member of society and competent in the work setting, learning must be a lifelong process.

With recent educational and social changes has come a natural questioning about the significance and uses of educational credit and credentials. Some critics assert that credits measure little more than classroom seat time. Others disparage credits and credentials as major obstacles to the realization of a learning society, arguing that credits and credentials are antithetical to the teaching-learning process. Some contend that credit and credentials should be awarded, not by educational institutions, but rather by other agencies, a change that would separate the teaching and certifying functions. Still others would abolish credit and credentials altogether.

There is much to criticize about credit and credentials, but they do nonetheless convey important information about learning accomplishments that is both educationally and socially useful. Moreover, the credit and credentialing policies and practices in postsecondary education institutions have not been unresponsive to educational and social change. For example, credit by examination is used extensively, and procedures have been instituted for translating extrainstitutional learning into credit recommendations that can be used by institutions. The

advantages of separating the teaching and credentialing functions lack the clarity needed to justify such sweeping change.

Yet there remains an urgent need to modify the credit and credentialing system in order that it may serve adequately present-day educational and social needs. The recommendations that follow are directed to that end.

The Recommendations

The recommendations that follow have been formulated with the overriding purpose of improving the quality of information conveyed by educational credit and credentials. Other aims are:

- To encourage lifelong learning and the maximum use of all educational resources
- To recognize educational accomplishment, regardless of how or where that accomplishment is attained
- To improve the appreciation and understanding of the proper basis for awarding credit and credentials
- To encourage appropriate uses by all segments of society of the credentials conferred by institutions of postsecondary education
- To develop improved and expanded procedures for assessing educational accomplishment in order to increase flexibility for learners to meet educational requirements, particularly at the undergraduate level
- To reduce unnecessary barriers that restrict student mobility and access to educational programs
- To improve articulation among postsecondary institutions and programs and the extrainstitutional learning experiences available in society, including the improved placement of students in educational programs
- To improve educational credentials as alternatives to governmental and voluntary certification for identifying the qualified

The recommendations are intended to apply broadly across postsecondary education—to vocational, technical, professional, general/liberal education, and the disciplines; to pub-

lic, private nonprofit, and proprietary institutions; and to nondegree, undergraduate, and, less generally, graduate programs. Because curricula in postsecondary education are diverse and the educational objectives of students are wide-ranging, the extent to which the recommendations can be implemented will vary from program to program and from institution to institution.

RECOMMENDATION ONE

The basic system of credit and credentials for postsecondary education should be retained, but it should be modified to serve more adequately present-day educational and social needs.

Credit and credentials permeate postsecondary education and have substantial roots in the economic and social system. Funding formulas, salary and wage scales, qualification for employment, and social standing, for example, often make use of the present system. The credit and credential system has the decided advantage of being generally understood, both in its operation and its imperfections. That basis of understanding suggests that the present system should be modified to meet present-day needs rather than be replaced by a new system—assuming that a better system could be conceptualized and designed.

The system's shortcomings derive mainly from the inadequacy and inaccuracy of the information conveyed, from reluctance to deviate from commonly accepted time frames and places and modes of instruction, and from infrequent use of nonclassroom educational requirements (work-study, theses, comprehensive examinations, etc.), particularly at the undergraduate level. These shortcomings can be corrected by giving increased emphasis to assessing and communicating educational accomplishment and its implications for performance in work and social settings, to designing more-flexible educational

programs, and to incorporating the results of varied educational experiences into the current system of credit and credentials.

The system has already shown considerable strength and flexibility in adapting to the changing needs of education and society. It is being used to some extent to record extrainstitutional learning, learning measured by examinations, experiential learning, independent study, and self-paced instruction. For many years, the system has been flexible enough to combine classroom and laboratory instruction with learning demonstrated by such means as writing theses and passing comprehensive examinations. This characteristic of the system has been especially evident at the graduate level.

The problems inherent in trying to conceptualize, design, and implement a new system and the probable educational and social repercussions strongly suggest that, at this time, adoption of a strategy aimed at accepting but modifying the current system is clearly the preferable and more promising course.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

A. The primary responsibility for awarding degrees should remain with the faculties, administrations, and boards of control of accredited institutions that are legally authorized to grant such formal recognition.

The widespread use and acceptance of degrees awarded by postsecondary education institutions can largely be attributed to the following: (1) faculties and administrations that have, by and large, performed in a socially responsible manner, (2) boards of control that have exercised general oversight of the academic enterprise for the public or for broadly based constituencies but that have delegated extensive responsibility to the faculty and administration of institutions, and (3) a system of peer review that has been exercised through nongovernmental accreditation. Degree-granting institutions that lack any one of the three components should be severely limited in number and in the total proportion of degrees awarded. De-

gree-granting arrangements that deviate from the norm should be authorized only for sound social reasons and should serve purposes that are primarily educational.[1]

Degrees will continue to be socially useful only if they retain their uniqueness. That uniqueness flows from the historical and central role of faculties in designing educational programs, in establishing requirements for degrees, and in certifying and setting standards for educational accomplishment.

Qualified faculties, with substantial academic independence, with their responsibility delegated to them by boards of control, and with peer review provided by nongovernmental accreditation, are the best sources in society for the expertise needed to exercise the degree-granting function. In a complex, technological society, education for work requirements must be balanced with cultural considerations in education. While the importance of education for work cannot be minimized, neither can the importance of education designed to advance the understanding and quality of cultural values, the environment, the human condition, and to develop analytical, communication, quantitative, and synthesizing skills. The composition and organization of faculties, though not guaranteeing the avoidance of narrow, self-seeking interests, tends to bring balance to these considerations.

External degree programs embodying the above characteristics for granting degrees are useful and valid means of certifying educational accomplishment and should be considered acceptable alternatives to traditional degree programs.

> *B. Institutions or organizations that lack the proper degree-granting structure described above should limit their awards to certificates or other credentials whose designations are clearly distinguishable from degrees. Undergraduate degrees should not be awarded by any institution for programs that lack a general/liberal education component.*

1. See "Statement of Principles Regarding Degree Granting by Federal Agencies," *Higher Education and National Affairs* (American Council on Education) October 29, 1976, p. 3.

The important educational role played by institutions which lack the characteristics necessary for the award of degrees is increasingly being recognized, particularly in the areas of preparation for employment and upgrading of employment skills. Appropriate recognition for educational accomplishment attained in these settings is in the interests of both society and the individual. However, inasmuch as the primary purpose of educational awards is to communicate the meaning and type of educational accomplishment, designations for credentials awarded for these programs should remain distinct from degrees.

For reasons discussed in Recommendation Three, awards by any institution for undergraduate-level programs that lack a general/liberal education component should not be designated as degrees.

RECOMMENDATION THREE

Associate degrees and bachelor's degrees should attest to at least the following three types of accomplishment:

1. *Accomplishment specified by the awarding institution as necessary for the development of a broadly educated person, including familiarity with general areas of knowledge;*
2. *Competence in analytical, communication, quantitative, and synthesizing skills;*
3. *Accomplishment in a specialized area of study covering a set of integrated learnings requiring analysis, understanding of principles that have judgmental application, and a theoretical knowledge base.*[2]

Requirements for credentials designated as degrees have broad social implications: The refinement of academic skills and the extension of opportunities for general/liberal education beyond the secondary school undergirds a democratic

2. Associate degrees designed primarily as the general/liberal education component of the baccalaureate degree may be appropriately excepted from this requirement. In such cases, specialization is required for the baccalaureate.

society and enhances personal development. These general but highly refined competences attained through arduous study are essential for an informed citizenry and to the individual and should be encouraged by formal recognition. Also essential to society and the individual is the recognition of specialized competences related to the work setting.

A credential designated as a "degree" has been the primary device used by colleges and universities to recognize learning of the depth, breadth, and rigor associated with college study. The meaning of the undergraduate degree should be protected to preserve its legitimacy as an accolade for educational accomplishment at higher and broader levels of learning. The learning which the degree certifies should extend beyond the narrower educational qualifications for employment to include as well knowledge and skills characteristic of a broadly educated person.

Determining what constitutes a broadly educated person is difficult, and distinctions between higher and other learning are admittedly abstract. But the impact on the social fabric of appropriately recognizing and rewarding learning makes it important for both concepts to be discussed.

Certain qualities of degree-level learning reduce the abstruseness. These qualities include the attainment of a working familiarity with general areas of knowledge that begins the lifelong process of broadening and deepening the understanding of culture and environment; further refinement of personal values which motivate assumption of civic and social responsibilities; and the development of skills essential to an independent and resourceful learner—ideally, the development of the ethos of lifelong learning. Those skills include the proficient use of an array of educational resources available in the society and the ability to learn in many settings and by means of a variety of instructional modes.

At the associate and baccalaureate levels of accomplishment, certain other factors should characterize the learning. The emphasis should be on acquiring competence in different modes of thought and in analytical, communication, quantitative, and synthesizing skills, including accomplishment in a wide range of subject matter. Particularly at the baccalaureate

level, the learning should involve a body of theory and principles that have broad judgmental application.

The component of the degree covering accomplishment in a specialized area of study should generally conform to the characteristics of higher learning listed above, both for the academic disciplines and for learning related more directly to entry-level employment. The hallmark for occupational programs which use the degree as a credential should be a general/liberal education component that enhances competent judgment and application of knowledge in the work setting.

Stressing general/liberal education and in-depth, rigorous study in specialized areas does not denigrate or diminish, to either the individual or society, the importance of educational programs or institutions that focus solely on preparation for employment. But if recognizing and rewarding educational accomplishment are to be kept socially useful, the distinctions between awards for the completion of such programs and awards for the broader educational objectives associated with a degree should remain clear.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

Each credential-granting institution should clearly define, to the extent possible, the meaning of the certificates and degrees it awards.

So diverse are the curricula and objectives of postsecondary education and so pluralistic are the forms of control that the meaning of students' educational accomplishments cannot be standardized with precision. Moreover, even if the art and science of assessing and describing educational accomplishment were to become such that a precise interinstitutional credit and credentialing system were possible, it probably would run counter to ingrained educational philosophy. Diverse, pluralistic postsecondary education, encompassing the concept of institutional autonomy, is a credo commanding wide allegiance.

That allegiance, however, should be tempered by careful assessment of how society uses educational credentials and

now that use affects people, both those who hold such status and those who do not. Society's use of educational credentials, particularly for employment purposes, tends to assume standardization of meaning; in exception are the certificates and degrees of a limited number of colleges and universities which have attained and successfully perpetuated reputations for high quality.

Given the educational and social uses of educational credentials, institutions should seek to improve the quality of information conveyed by the credentials they confer. Degree designations and a transcript listing of course titles and grades fall short in meeting today's needs for accurate and adequate information on the qualifications of credential holders.

Narrative definitions would more adequately meet the needs of employers and other users and, over the long run, would be worth the effort and resources required to formulate the statements. If the certificate or the degree is directly related to qualification for employment, the definition should set forth, to the extent possible, the competences certified by the credential. All degree definitions should directly address the levels of the analytical, communication, quantitative, and synthesizing skills attained.

The specificity of definitions will, and should, vary by program. In some cases, an appropriate response may be a narrative description which defines a program of study that the holder successfully completed; in other cases, very specific statements regarding the student's competences may be possible and desirable.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE

Institutions should give careful attention to the use of degree designations, to include consistent use of the terms "arts" and "science."

Even with the availability of narrative definitions of degrees, degree designations—the most succinct communicators of educational accomplishment—will continue to be the only

level of information considered by many users. Clarity, then, with respect to degree designations will continue to be important.

The terms "arts" and "science" have traditionally been used as part of degree designations to distinguish between broad types of educational programs. Practices among institutions as well as within institutions in using the terms have not always been consistent, with a resulting loss of clarity.

Where either term is used in the designation, its significance should be established in the narrative definition for the degree. The use of "arts" or "science" across an institution should be consistent and the terms should be used only to make substantive distinctions among programs. In general, the "arts" should be used for the arts, humanities, and letters, and the term "science" for the sciences and applied sciences. Moreover, the terms should be generally limited to degrees in broad academic programs as opposed to programs more occupationally and professionally oriented. In the latter case, degree designations of only two components—level of accomplishment (e.g., associate, baccalaureate) and area of specialization (e.g., nursing, business administration) will add clarity to the information communicated by a degree designation.[3]

RECOMMENDATION SIX

Each postsecondary education institution should clearly define the meaning of the credit units it awards. Statements of educational accomplishment, as explicit as possible, should be made for each credit unit.

Credit units, such as courses and other increments of verified learning, represent the most basic and detailed level of information conveyed by credits and credentials. At this level of detail, the present system provides useful but inadequate information. The course titles listed on transcripts and the

3. The Council of Graduate Schools recently made recommendations on appropriate usage for graduate degrees.

course descriptions in catalogs are often ambiguous and generate little confidence that they reflect with precision the desired or actual learning outcomes.

Accurate, adequate descriptions of credit units would be helpful to employers who need the additional detail in determining qualification for employment, to educational counselors in placing students who transfer or change educational objectives, to students in choosing courses, and to students and others who seek increased accountability for the instructional process. Accurate information would also greatly enhance the possibility that educational accomplishment attained in extrainstitutional circumstances could be matched with the requirements for certificates and degrees.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

Postsecondary education, through its organizations, should work toward common meanings for certificates and for degrees that are in the same area of specialization and at the same level of accomplishment. Such efforts should include improvement of the accuracy and adequacy of descriptions of educational accomplishment represented by credit units and interinstitutional experimentation with common assessment instruments as one means of measuring and certifying analytical, communication, quantitative, and synthesizing skills.

The similar or identical certificate and degree designations used by thousands of institutions has created expectations that the credentialed hold certain educational accomplishments and competences in common. Such expectations are especially noticeable with respect to the component of the degree used to qualify for employment and with respect to analytical, communication, quantitative, and synthesizing skills.

Organized efforts to provide common meanings for degrees on an interinstitutional basis have usually taken the form of specialized accreditation of curricula by occupational associations or organizations of components of institutions. Spe-

cialized accreditation is a defensible activity in some fields because it is related to protection of the public health and safety. However, specialized accreditation of all curricula would be chaotic and a grossly expensive way of approaching the problem.

Recent conceptual and technological advances in the design of information systems and in information processing have potential application on an interinstitutional basis for describing and reporting educational accomplishment. It is perhaps possible to design an information system that could be used throughout postsecondary education but that would leave with institutional faculty the primary responsibility for formulating descriptions for credit units and definitions of degrees. Such a system would not only enhance diversity by providing adequate and accurate descriptions of educational programs but would also facilitate standardization of minimum levels of educational outcomes where they may be desirable.

An agency representative of postsecondary education should assume responsibility for an *experimental effort* to design such an information system. The system should be developed cooperatively with academic disciplinary and professional associations, practitioners, and users of the information, and it should include suggested information components for degree definitions and descriptions of credit units. If such a system is deemed feasible, an agency should be designated to assume ongoing responsibility for developing the program and for maintaining its usefulness.

Development of such a system would be consistent with recommendations four, five, and six, and could (1) lessen the pressures that cause proliferation of specialized accrediting, (2) provide institutions and their faculties with additional means for demonstrating accountability, and (3) improve horizontal and vertical articulation among postsecondary education institutions and programs.

The most substantial body of agreement regarding the attributes of the broadly educated person centers on analytical, communication, quantitative, and synthesizing skills. Degree holders are in general expected to be at least minimally proficient in these areas, and graduates who are not reflect unfavorably on all colleges and universities. These skills are also

the most susceptible to precise measurement through the use of common assessment instruments. Experimentation with interinstitutional assessment programs should be encouraged as one means for postsecondary education institutions to improve their accountability for this component of the degree.

The tests, or similar instruments, should also prove useful as a screening device for nondegree persons seeking to qualify for employment. For occupations requiring high-level analytical, communication, quantitative, and synthesizing skills, prospective employees could take the tests to establish whether they are comparably qualified to degree holders.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

Postsecondary education institutions should[4] develop alternative programs that (1) state requirements in terms of assessable educational accomplishment, and (2) permit students to demonstrate accomplishment without reference to time-bound and campus-bound instruction and learning.

Currently, the touchstone for credit and credentials is the learning achieved by qualified students during a specified period of formal instruction and study. But pedagogical theory, qualification for employment, and data on learning rates do not generally support rigid adherence to the quarter or semester time frames or the two-year and four-year time spans for earning associate and bachelor's degrees. Courses and degree programs within an institution vary significantly in rigor and difficulty, just as they do among postsecondary education institutions. Students, too, differ in academic aptitudes, inter-

4. This report frequently uses the wording "postsecondary education institutions should." The wording is addressed to postsecondary institutions collectively unless otherwise specified; it is not intended to mean "all postsecondary institutions should." The Task Force recognizes that, among institutions, purposes are diverse and that, for many institutions, some recommendations may be inappropriate. Each institution is, however, urged to consider each recommendation.

ests, and educational experiences, and therefore also differ in their learning abilities and rates. Intense competition for status among academic disciplines and professional programs exerts invalid but nonetheless real pressures on course structures, standardization of time frames, and methods for earning degrees.

For at least two reasons, the great bulk of learning and instruction probably must continue to be delivered in modular form despite its inherent pedagogical limitations: society must, of necessity, set limits on the resources it can devote to mass postsecondary education; and the use of courses and specified time frames for earning credentials is a comfortable, preferred, and productive learning style for many students.

On the other hand, educational programs that are not bounded by time or by places and types of instruction need to become more abundant for high achievers recently graduated from secondary schools, for highly motivated adults who return to formal study after considerable work experience and extrainstitutional learning, and for all students who, for sound educational reasons, can combine work with study. Flexible programs would encourage undergraduate learners to use self-directed study, correspondence and media instruction, internships, and other nonclassroom learning modes. Flexible programs and the learning modes cited above all contribute to inculcating the ethos of lifelong learning and lessening dependence on time-bound and place-bound instruction and learning.

RECOMMENDATION NINE

Postsecondary education institutions, individually and through interinstitutional efforts, should give high priority to developing improved, technically sound approaches for evaluating educational accomplishment attained under their sponsorship and for assessing equivalent learning attained in extrainstitutional settings.

Evaluation of educational accomplishment is the sine qua non of credit and credentials. Without verification of the com-

petences, knowledge, and skills that mark educational accomplishment, certification is meaningless. The reason for technically reliable and valid evaluation of educational accomplishment goes beyond certification. Effective evaluation is also essential to sound pedagogy.

Because evaluation is dependent on expert judgment, qualified faculty must predominate in the evaluation of all educational accomplishment to assure that academic standards are maintained and that evaluation instruments are valid and reliable.

Despite the critical role of faculty members in the evaluation of educational accomplishment, few have been formally trained in evaluation, and only moderate effort has been devoted to improving their evaluation skills. Institutional faculty development programs on evaluation are one means for improving the evaluation of educational accomplishment. In addition, graduate programs for preparing new faculty members should include the development of competences in evaluation.

RECOMMENDATION TEN

Postsecondary education institutions should implement policies and procedures for awarding credit for educational accomplishment attained in extrainstitutional settings. Faculties of institutions, in accordance with the established framework of individual institutional authority and responsibility, should be directly responsible for assessing the equivalency of educational accomplishment attained in extrainstitutional circumstances and for formulating policy for accepting the results of nationally validated examinations or other procedures for establishing credit equivalencies.[5]

5. The Board of Directors of the American Council on Education adopted as ACE policy a statement initiated by the ACE Commission on Educational Credit and subsequently endorsed by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation. The statement urges institutions to develop policies and procedures for awarding credit for extrainstitutional learning. The above recommendation and the supporting narrative are similar to the policy statement.

Assessing extrainstitutional learning and awarding appropriate credit toward the requirements for a certificate or a degree can serve two purposes: (1) improved social fairness of certificates and degrees used as credentials to qualify for employment, and (2) proper placement of students in educational programs. The latter purpose has received insufficient attention by most faculties. Teaching students what they already know is both stultifying to them and wasteful of educational and personal resources.

Awarding credit for extrainstitutional learning should be under the control of the faculty responsible for establishing requirements for degrees. In evaluating extrainstitutional learning and formulating policy for accepting credit equivalencies established through national programs, faculties should use the following guidelines:

1. Evaluation of educational accomplishment is essential. Experience, whether it be acquired at work, in social settings, in the library, at home, or in the formal classroom, is in itself an inadequate basis for awarding credit. Increased attention to evaluation procedures and techniques is necessary when learning has been attained without participation in a program of study prescribed by an educational institution.

2. In determining whether it is appropriate to accept a student's extrainstitutional learning for credit, the governing consideration should be the student's educational objective, including the requirements for graduation. Learning should be articulated, documented, and measured in the context of the institution's role and the student's educational objective.

3. Institutions should evaluate extrainstitutional learning and award credit only in subject-matter fields in which they have available faculty expertise or where they can rely on nationally validated examinations or other equally acceptable procedures for establishing credit equivalencies. Normally, institutions should evaluate learning and award credit only in subject fields in which they offer comparable courses or curricula; however, elective credit appropriately may be excepted.

4. Institutions awarding credit for extrainstitutional learning should develop clearly stated policies and other information related to administrative responsibility, student eligibility,

means of assessment, recording of results on transcripts, storage of documentation, student fees, and maximum number of credits allowable.

5. Institution policy should provide for the periodic reevaluation of all policies and procedures related to the awarding of credit for extrainstitutional learning.

On a broader scale, agencies engaged in interinstitutional efforts to establish credit equivalencies for extrainstitutional learning have an obligation to involve academicians from postsecondary education institutions in evaluation activities, in the development of assessment instruments, and in the establishment of policy. Faculties are likewise obligated to be informed about the policies and procedures that national agencies use for establishing credit equivalencies and also to assure themselves that the national assessment instruments they use in exercising the credentialing function are valid and reliable.

RECOMMENDATION ELEVEN

Postsecondary education institutions should consider the needs of mobile and older adult students, providing them with sufficient information, orientation, and counseling on the requirements for credentials and on the policies for the transfer of credit and for the award of credit for extrainstitutional learning.

Mobile and older adult students, many of whom attend part time, have become a major clientele for postsecondary education. They have needs, educational accomplishments, and educational objectives that differ from those of the traditional college-age student. As a result, they bring both new problems and new opportunities to the institutions that seek to serve them.

The mature student may have educational accomplishments attained in extrainstitutional settings or at other institutions which are equivalent to at least some of an institution's requirements for an educational credential. Clearly enunciated institutional procedures and decision rules for acceptance of such accomplishment, certified either by other institutions or

by nationally validated examinations and procedures for establishing credit equivalencies, are essential.

Because the mature student often has family or other obligations that prohibit full-time attendance, an important element in educational programming is flexibility. Flexible programming may include counseling the mature student to take advantage of nonclassroom instruction and educational resources available in the work setting or elsewhere in the community in order to satisfy the institution's requirements for a credential.

Under such circumstances, the guidance and counseling role of the institution takes on increased importance. Institutions will probably continue to provide the bulk of instruction for such students, but, by exercising a counseling and credentialing function, they can also help students increase their self-reliance and resourcefulness as lifelong learners.

RECOMMENDATION TWELVE

Postsecondary education institutions should carefully define and evaluate existing and new requirements for residence study to assure that their requirements have educational validity.

Of all the requirements for educational credentials, residence requirements are perhaps the most in need of reevaluation as justifiable requirements for credentials. As barriers to the attainment of an educational credential, they have no equal. Residence requirements vary widely in application and meaning from institution to institution. One institution may require that the student live on campus. Another may stipulate that the student study at the institution for a specified number of terms, months, or years. Yet another may require that the student be engaged in full-time study for a certain period of time. Still others may require that a specified number of credits or courses be completed in "residence." These requirements may be valid at one institution and invalid at another, or may be valid for one program within an institution and invalid for another.

In assessing the validity of residence requirements, institutions should consider the following questions:

1. Is residence study essential to the unique meaning of the institution's degree?
2. Will residence study result in identifiable and measurable educational accomplishment that cannot otherwise be attained or assessed?
3. Are the residence requirements justified by differences in curricula or in the demographic attributes of students?

a) If the requirement is for maturation or socialization purposes, are students who will complete college without intervening or concomitant work experiences treated differently from the more broadly experienced student?

b) Do the requirements differ among curricula? For example, do curricula requiring development of clinical or laboratory skills require more extensive residence instruction than curricula in general studies?

4. Are the residence requirements justifiable as a means for assuring that transfer students meet the institution's standards for educational accomplishment; that is, is a period of residence required to validate previous educational accomplishment?

RECOMMENDATION THIRTEEN

National and regional organizations, including academic disciplinary and professional associations, and state agencies should give vigorous attention to transfer policies and should encourage interinstitutional efforts to develop articulation agreements and to eliminate arbitrary transfer barriers.

Transfer is an educational issue that is becoming political. There is no guarantee that it will remain primarily an educational issue unless institutions meet their responsibilities to eliminate arbitrary barriers that have little or no educational significance. Public institutions, consistent with their roles as part of state systems of postsecondary education, bear a special responsibility for developing articulation agreements and

equitable policies for serving transfer students. Singling out public institutions is not meant to deemphasize the importance of private institutions taking similar steps.

Preceding recommendations that are directed to improving the quality of information regarding educational accomplishment, if implemented, can provide institutions with the basic data needed for transfer of credit and valid placement in educational programs. But that advance will not eliminate the need for institutions to assess their policies and attitudes on the transfer of credit and to remove barriers that cannot be justified. Assessment by institutions should consider the following:

1. Transfer must be viewed in the larger context of institutional purposes and goals. If an institutional purpose is to serve the transfer student or the mature adult who has had extrainstitutional learning experiences, essential to that purpose are policies that permit equitable transfer of credit and specially designed programs that accommodate the transfer and mature student.

2. Transfer-of-credit policies should encompass educational accomplishment attained at other accredited institutions of postsecondary education as well as equivalent educational accomplishment attained in extrainstitutional situations. Consideration should be given to the American Council on Education credit recommendations, the use of credit-by-examination programs, and faculty evaluation procedures as means of validating extrainstitutional learning for transfer purposes. Whether the learning has been attained in accredited institutions or from extrainstitutional sources, the following questions should apply to the learning being considered for transfer:

a) Is the learning comparable to that required by the receiving institution?

b) Is the quality of the learning comparable to that attained at the receiving institution?

c) Is the learning appropriate to the student's educational objective?

3. Departmental transfer practices should be reviewed to assure that they are consistent with institutional policies.

4. Successful intrastate transfer and articulation agreements should be extended to regional or interstate agreements in areas where there is high mobility of students. All such efforts should have as participants private institutions whose purposes include serving transfer students and mature adults.

5. Institutions should establish mechanisms for providing services to transfer students and mature adults who have had extrainstitutional learning, including guidance and counseling and the publication of appropriate information.

RECOMMENDATION FOURTEEN

Credit for continuing education courses, where standards, course objectives, and evaluation of educational accomplishment differ from regular credit courses, should be evaluated by methods appropriate for extrainstitutional learning. Direct formula conversion of measures such as the continuing education unit (CEU) is not appropriate.

Confusion exists in the academic community regarding the proper use of the continuing education unit. The confusion has arisen, perhaps, because the concept of the CEU was introduced at about the same time that nontraditional education and educational alternatives gained prominence. Some people apparently assume that the CEU is an alternative to the credit hour and that it should be used for recognizing educational alternatives and converted to units of credit on a formula basis.

The continuing education unit concept is too new to draw firm conclusions about its educational and social utility. As a record of educational experiences, it differs from other forms of recognition that can be appropriately combined and lead to the award of degrees or certificates. CEU's are useful as: (1) a measure of effort and resources expended by an institution or organization in providing the educational program, (2) a measure for people who want a record of their non-degree-related but organized educational activity; and (3) a measure for

third parties (i.e., professional groups, licensing agencies, employers) who need a record of a person's participation in organized educational activity but do not need a high degree of assurance that learning actually occurred.

Because education programs awarding continuing education units are extraordinarily diverse in objectives and do not require evaluation of student accomplishment, CEU's should never be directly converted to credit units on a formula basis. That restriction does not mean that educational accomplishment attained in continuing education classes cannot be applied toward the requirements for a degree. In instances where the accomplishment is applicable, the educational accomplishment must be articulated with the student's certificate or degree objective and individually evaluated through assessment procedures appropriate for extrainstitutional learning.

RECOMMENDATION FIFTEEN

Postsecondary education institutions should formulate their roles in recredentialing consistent with their function of providing educational programs.

Although recredentialing has not yet manifested itself as revalidation of educational credentials, it is becoming commonplace in licensure and voluntary certification. Rapid advances in knowledge are being made in most fields. Additionally, there is growing recognition that competence once attained is not necessarily indefinitely retained. Therefore, recredentialing for the purpose of identifying qualified persons for continuing employment is a rapidly growing phenomenon virtually certain to gain additional momentum.

Postsecondary education institutions, working with professional associations, should begin to explore the possibility of revalidating educational credentials consistent with the credential's use as a qualifier for employment. Where continuing education programs are designed to update holders' credentials or to assure their continuing competence, evaluation of a person's educational accomplishment should be required. In both cases, principles enunciated in this report will apply.

Needed Next Steps

The fifteen recommendations in this report have implications that go far beyond the overall objective of improving the quality of information conveyed by credit and credentials. Their implementation can help institutions demonstrate their accountability to all their constituencies—students, parents, employers; external monitoring agencies, government, and their peer institutions; and others who support them or have an interest in their operations.

In the era of financial stringency, institutions are being called on to justify their programs. Students are interested, more than before, in specific educational outcomes and are involving institutions in litigation over whether their expectations have been realized. Parents and employers are seeking specific information about educational programs and outcomes as the competition intensifies among institutions for students and among college graduates for jobs.

Inasmuch as credit and credentials reflect the programs, the requirements, and outcomes of postsecondary education, the recommendations, if successfully implemented, should help institutions with their external communications. Internally, the recommendations will assist in the formulation of more concrete and measurable educational objectives, in the improvement of the design of educational programs and the evaluation of their effectiveness, and in the wiser use of educational resources.

Implementing the recommendations need not be the onerous chore that a first reading may suggest. To the contrary, many of the recommendations point first to collective developmental efforts by the postsecondary educational community. The results will make implementation by institutions much easier

and cost effective. Examples are the development of an information system for defining degrees and credit units and the construction of common assessment instruments to measure analytical, communication, quantitative, and synthesizing skills.

The implications noted here are by no means exhaustive. In considering the recommendations, leaders of institutions and the postsecondary educational community should ponder the implications for themselves, both for what will happen if they are implemented and what will happen if they are not.

AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

J. W. PELTASON, *President*

The American Council on Education, founded in 1918 and composed of institutions of higher education and national and regional education associations, is the nation's major coordinating body for postsecondary education. Through voluntary and cooperative action, the Council provides comprehensive leadership for improving educational standards, policies, and services.

The Office on Educational Credit is the Council's division concerned with credit and credentialing policies and practices in postsecondary education. The role of the office and its policy-making and advisory arm, the Commission on Educational Credit, is to give attention to educational credit and credentialing policies for postsecondary education; to foster high standards and sound practices for the evaluation and recognition of extrainstitutional learning; to foster and operate programs to establish and publish credit equivalencies for extrainstitutional learning, and to advise postsecondary education institutions on how these credit equivalencies can be used in placing students in academic programs and in credentialing educational accomplishment; to assist postsecondary education institutions in providing people with due recognition for competency, knowledge, and skills, wherever and however obtained; and to provide people with an alternative means of demonstrating high-school-graduation competences.

OEC makes credit recommendations for testing programs such as the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) and administers the General Educational Development (GED) Testing Program. OEC also makes credit recommendations for formal courses offered by the military and other noncollegiate sponsors such as business, industry, government agencies, voluntary and professional associations, and labor unions; for Army military occupational specialties (MOS's) and Navy ratings; and for home study courses accredited by the National Home Study Council. In a new study for the U.S. Department of Labor, the Office will determine whether credit recommendations can be made for apprenticeship programs registered with the Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training. The office's Task Force on Educational Credit and Credentials has developed recommendations for improving the credit and credentialing system. The final report of the Task Force, *Credentialing Educational Accomplishment*, will be published in the summer of 1978.